

## The 7 Most Common Veteran Scams

[www.scambusters.org/veteranscams.html](http://www.scambusters.org/veteranscams.html)

In this week's issue, we highlight the 7 most common veteran scams to be on the alert for.

Veteran scams, targeting a group of people who provide such a valuable and selfless service to their country, have to be one of the most despicable crimes.

Not only do the crooks have our vets in their sights but they also abuse their reputation by pulling off con tricks in their names.

They trade on other people's patriotism and gratitude to make money that really belongs in the pockets of vets.

For example, in a recent case in Utah, a national charity that advertised for people to donate their old cars so they could be sold, with the proceeds going directly to veterans, was called to account by the state's Consumer Affairs Department for failing to do so.

That meant that not only did vets lose out but also that people who donated their cars were allegedly misled when they agreed to hand over their autos.

In place of being further investigated, the charity, which is not based in Utah, agreed to make a big donation to one of the state's veterans' organizations -- as well as changing the words of its ads.

Here's a rundown of the 7 most common veteran scams:

### Scams That Target Veterans

1. Special deals for vets. These veteran scams take a number of forms -- usually offering a discount on things like loans, car purchases and house rentals.

They may not be really discounted at all. And, in some cases, they may be for non-existent products or services, fooling veterans into parting with their money in the belief that they get a special deal when, in fact, they get nothing at all.

**Action:** Some organizations do offer genuine discounts for veterans but check these offers out carefully and, as we always warn, never wire payments to someone you don't know.

2. Phishing. The most common trick here is for the scammer to phone the victim, claiming to be from the Veterans Administration, who supposedly need to update their records.

**Action:** Don't accept the caller is who they say they are. Ask for their name, hang up and call the VA yourself to check.

3. Dubious investment advice. According to the retirement organization, AARP, solicitors calling themselves "veterans advocates" target vets in community centers and nursing homes, claiming their victims are entitled to additional benefits.

They say they need to review the veteran's investment portfolio first and then they usually try to persuade them to place their investment in a trust, so they appear to have fewer assets than they really have, entitling them to an additional pension.

That may or may not be true, but as AARP says, "The bigger concern is that the new trust usually contains annuities, long-term investments that are often considered inappropriate for older retirees. Some annuities must be held for a decade or longer before they pay out a monthly income."

Read the AARP article, [Taking Aim at Old Soldiers](#), for more information and advice on what to do.

Note, in particular, their advice that you should always check out the credentials of an investment adviser via your [state regulatory office](#).

4. Charging for military records. This veteran scam is a variation on a well-known con in which people are fooled into paying for information that's already available for free.

**Action:** Contact the VA or your service unit if you want copies of your records. Don't allow someone who's providing another type of service for you to claim they have to pay for your records -- get them yourself.

### **Scams That Pose as Being for Veterans or Active Military Personnel**

5. Nigerian scams. Two well-known variations of the Nigerian scams, which try to fool people into handing over money, use the military as a cover story.

The original Nigerian email scam in which the crook claims to have access to money or valuables they want you to help smuggle out of the country, pretends to be from a soldier on active duty who has discovered a secret stash.

This was more common during the days of the war in Iraq.

More recently, the scammers have changed their game, now posing as lonely-heart servicemen or veterans in search of love but needing money to help get them out of the service or start a business.

**Action:** Both variations require you to pay money upfront. Don't!

6. Charity fundraising. There are almost too many of these fundraising scams to count.

They pop up at any time of the year but especially on Veterans Day or other military occasions and usually solicit funds they claim will go to veterans' charities.

Sometimes, they actually do -- but often only a tiny amount is passed on, keeping the fundraising activity inside the law.

Other times they're just plain shams -- keeping all the money for themselves.

**Action:** Be very wary about donating to any charity unless you know the collector or make the donation directly to a veterans' organization you know or have checked out.

Bogus charities often use official sounding names, using words like "veterans" and "foundation" to try to convince you of their status.

If you want to know more about a charity's credentials and how it spends its money, check out the [Wise Giving Alliance register](#) or the [Charity Navigator](#).

7. Bogus selling. Again, this veteran scam can take a number of forms.

Most commonly, a door-to-door solicitor claims to be a vet or to be working for an organization that supports veterans.

They appeal to your sympathies to buy from them but, again, the amount of money they get (if they genuinely are veterans) or the amount donated to charity is small in relation to the amount you hand over.

The other common trick appears in online auction and classified ad sites in which a scammer claims to be in active military service, heading for an overseas assignment.

So, they say, they are selling their car, or some other high priced item, really cheap for a quick sale. In reality, they have nothing to sell.

**Action:** These con artists usually want you to wire payment or use a phony escrow service. Again, don't send money to someone you don't know and haven't checked out thoroughly.

Scammers know how grateful we are to our veterans. And they know how much veterans appreciate the special concessions that many organizations legitimately offer.

They exploit both of these in pursuit of their crime. But, hopefully, now you'll be on double alert for veteran scams, so you can make sure your money goes or stays where it belongs!